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## THE PRESS AND THE BAY OF PIGS II

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As one of the opposition "conscientes at work" the night *The New York Times* watered down Tad Szulc's story about the "imminence" of the Bay of Pigs invasion and reduced its play from the planned four-column headline leading the paper to a single-column head in a less important position, I should like to add a couple of footnotes to the article by Victor Bernstein and Jesse Gordon.

The authors express the opinion that it probably would have done no good for the *Times* to have "told all" on April 7, 1961, ten days before the invasion, saying that the planning had reached the point of no return. That may well be, but it also may well not be. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. in *A Thousand Days* says, in a sentence immediately following one containing the phrase "early in April," that "Had one senior adviser opposed the adventure, I believe that Kennedy would have cancelled it" (pages 258-9). The only opposition, he says, came from Senator Fulbright and himself. Schlesinger also quotes the President as having said, "You know, I've reserved the right to stop this thing up to 24 hours before the landing" (page 256). It does not seem impossible that had the *Times* printed the Szulc story as planned, the prestigious exposure of what was supposed to be a secret operation and the public outcry and pressure that probably would have followed might well have given Kennedy exactly the excuse he needed to call the whole thing off.

The President is quoted as having said a fortnight later to Turner Cat-

ledge, then managing editor of the *Times*: "If you had printed more about the operation, you would have saved us from a colossal mistake." Messrs. Bernstein and Gordon dismiss this as an attempt "to share his monopoly of wrong decisions." But Schlesinger, too, says, "In retrospect I have wondered whether, if the press had behaved irresponsibly, it would not have spared the country a disaster" (page 261). Schlesinger had no wrong decisions to share.

That word "irresponsibly" raises an additional point requiring clarification. I contend that it would not by any means have been irresponsible to print the Szulc story as written and to display it as originally planned.

On the night of April 6 when Orvil E. Dryfoos, then publisher of the *Times*, decided after consultation with Catledge and James Reston, to eliminate some material from the Szulc story and to reduce its play, Lewis Jordan, the news editor, and I not only objected but were distressed. It was the only instance of any importance that I could recall in which a publisher of the *Times* had interfered with a decision by the editors responsible for the presentation and display of the news. The next day Mr. Dryfoos, aware of our distress, asked me to come to his office so that he could explain his thinking. He said the matter had been put to him on the basis of the national interest. His motives, of course, were of the highest and he had acted on that basis. I argued that there was a distinction between the national interest and national security and that he had

confused the two. I pointed out, to underscore the absence of a national security consideration, that not a single American life would have been imperiled by our original plan for presenting the news.

When matters of national security arise in a war situation or a near-war situation, there is not the slightest question about what course the press should follow. Editors cannot have the information or specialized knowledge that would allow them to dispute an official determination that the country's safety might be jeopardized. But matters of national interest are different. They may well be political issues, and one man's opinion of what is in the nation's interest may be as good as another's. The distinction is much like that between a doctor's hustling you off to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy and his suggestion that you cut down on liquor.

In matters of national interest the press has not only a proper option but indeed a bounden duty to speak up. The press must keep in mind that even the President himself plays different roles on different occasions: sometimes he is the constitutional commander-in-chief, sometimes he is the country's political leader. The organs of public information have to draw the line between the national security and the national interest and then act appropriately.

THEODORE M. BERNSTEIN  
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1925 B. Litt., Journalism  
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Victor Bernstein and Jesse Gordon  
write:

In speculating on what effect a news story might have on a President no longer able to give evidence, hindsight

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